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MEMORANDUM OF TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Telcon with the President of Russia

PARTICIPANTS: The President
President Putin

Interpreter: Peter Afanasenko

Notetakers: Derek Westfall, Diana Schmidt,
and Todd Whatley

DATE, TIME March 28, 2007, 7:34 a.m. - 8:08 a.m. EDT
AND PLACE: Oval Office

The President: Hey, Vladimir. How are you doing? (U)

President Putin: Just fine George, how are you? (U)

The President: Your English is even better than before. (U)

President Putin: I'm trying my best. I see you have been fighting against Congress there. (U)

The President: I'm fighting like mad. I'll win. (U)

President Putin: I'm glad to hear it. (U)

The President: Listen, it's been a while, and we need to keep in contact. This is part of my effort to make sure you know that I care about your opinions and we can work together on sensitive issues. (C)

President Putin: I'm very glad to hear you, thank you for calling me. (U)

The President: Sometimes we both have concerns that our governments talk past each other and it is our job to make sure our governments work with each other. Let me bring up a couple issues, then if you'd like to respond I'd appreciate it. ~~(C)~~

President Putin: Glad to. (U)

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Classified by: V. Phillip Lago
Reason: 1.4 (d)
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The President: The first issue is Iran. Thank you very much for working closely to send a clear message to the Iranians. It goes to show what can happen when Russia and the U.S. work closely together. You took the lead and I thank you for helping in the latest round. We'll have to keep working. (S)

Secondly, there is big concern and talk about this missile defense issue. It brings up opportunities for people to claim this is a U.S. attempt to isolate Russia and divide Europe into different camps. And I can understand that people looking at this issue on the surface might come to that conclusion. My intention is not to isolate Russia but to provide a missile shield from missile threats to Europe and yourself from the ultimate threat, the Mideast. These threats don't exist today, but may in the future. Therefore, Vladimir, I propose in order to reduce suspicions we make clear that we have continued U.S.-Russia cooperation and consultation. I would like to share technology with you, so the people of Russia understand this shield protects them as well as anyone else. (S)

And finally, the issue of Kosovo. This is a very sensitive issue for you obviously and I know how sensitive it is. We have come to the conclusion that we need a Security Council resolution along the lines that Mr. Ahtisaari put out. I know Nick Burns, our number three at State, will be in consultation with his counterpart and I know we have been talking to Lavrov. The purpose is to see if there is some way we can work together on an issue that looks like it could lead to problems between Russia, the U.S., and others. I'm not sure if we can head it off or not, but it is worth trying. My message is, I hope you realize that on this sensitive issue we want to have dialogue and see if there is a way to move the issue forward. (S)

I'm sending my Commerce man over, a guy named Gutierrez. He took Don Evans' place. He is a good friend of mine and will bring a message of cooperation on trade and other matters. (S)

That's really what I wanted to discuss. By the way, on the point of Congress, I believe they have given me a great gift. They want to tell the generals how to run the war, and the people understand that would be a mistake. Now that they made their move, I'll make mine. I will be traveling the country to explain to people. I appreciate your concern for your old buddy. I'm still standing and still battling. (S)

President Putin: That's clear. Thank you for your evaluation of these issues. First, I would like to pass the best regards from Mr. Aznar, former President of Spain. We've been talking about you and remembering you so he passes his best. Now to the point.
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(Concerning Iran, truly it was a difficult decision but I'm glad we were able to reach a consensus on this decision. As we discussed with you, the most important thing here is to avoid any kind of gaps. In parallel to the voting, a joint statement was issued by the foreign ministers that expressed the need to continue talks based on decisions previously taken by the six countries. We will continue to work in a consultative manner. And we are going to continue agreeing on our position. Despite differences at the working level, we will work them out and look for consensus. At the same time, we should not give Iran the opportunity to take ill-considered steps that would be impossible to remedy. This has to do with how we implement this resolution.

(Since we've started talking about nuclear issues, I would like to say that our experts have been quite successful to move forward and reinforce the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Now they are coordinating the joint statement they are going to make on this issue. We could put a date for these statements in accordance with our G8 June meeting. I think it would be a good message. As for the peaceful use of nuclear energy documents, we are working on them according to schedule. (S)

(Now to the elements of missile defense in Europe. We have serious concerns about this, and it is not just over the few missiles to be placed in Europe. Therefore, when you say there is an opportunity to cooperate and share technology it looks very attractive. We have suggested ways in the NATO-Russia Council that the U.S. and Russia can cooperate, options beneficial to not just NATO but Russia. The essence of which you have just proposed. But the U.S. delegation in Brussels has blocked this proposal. We were directly told that the U.S. side cannot agree to these provisions. We need to take into account the security interests of NATO and Russia. What you have just stated is an interesting change in the U.S. position and we will accept it. (S)

(Speaking on the placement of European bases, technically speaking, our experts think the placement is not perfect in geographical terms, especially if we are talking about countering threats from North Korea and Iran. Most importantly, these European bases are a component of a global anti-missile defense system. Certainly the combination of anti-missile defense systems and strategic systems will lead to the potential of a first strike capability. We have known each other for many years and we respect each other. You can be sure of my respect and my frankness with you. What I've just said about this combination of anti-missile defense systems and missiles, it is in your strategic interest and we cannot turn a blind eye to it in

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(Russia. For the first time in a while, the U.S. is starting to put a strategic component into your presence in Europe and it is a permanent part of the relationship. We would like to respond to your initiative to start discussions on issues and to share technology and we should seek to do so in the framework of frank discussion. (S)

(As for Kosovo, you know that I will tell you something beyond protocol, absolutely frankly, that we are seriously concerned about what is going on there. It is a very dangerous precedent for the whole of Europe. I don't know what your agreement with the Europeans is, but I know many are reluctant to accept this decision because in many parts of Europe, separatism is quite strong. Obviously, if Kosovo is granted independence it will have an impact on all separatist regions. It will be interpreted by others as their right to declare independence. This is the idea the USSR used to promote to fight colonialism and now the U.S. is using it. In the post-Soviet area there are a number of similar conflicts. Yesterday I talked to the President of Azerbaijan and they are following the situation with great caution because it will have a great impact on developments in Nagorno-Karabakh. The same goes for South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia. Finally, it is most important for Serbia. Serbia is seeking membership in the EU and sooner or later Serbia will accept a variant that would be acceptable to the EU and acceptable to the West in general, but it will be a decision taken by Serbia itself. But if we impose this decision today, it will be a decision imposed by other countries. It will be very bad for the Serbians and will create the potential for conflict for many decades to come. Therefore, it would be very difficult for us to support the Ahtisaari plan. I reiterate that sooner or later this situation will be resolved by Serbia itself in the context of Serbia's wanting to join the EU and NATO. I believe the argument that Kosovo is 90 percent Albanian is a bad one. Let's bring back the refugees, then we will not have 90 percent Albanians. We have forgotten about the humanitarian problem with the refugees. I believe on this issue we should get down to the table of negotiations and increased information sharing between our foreign ministries, with Condi and Lavrov. (S)

(The last point I would like to raise is the Adapted Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. Russia has not only signed but has ratified the treaty and we not only have ratified but are implementing the treaty. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that under this treaty we have agreed to not put heavy weapons in certain parts of Russia. This was an idiotic decision by our side. Just imagine if the U.S. had to limit itself where to place weapons in California, Texas or elsewhere. It's the same. But we are doing this and implementing this. We have dismantled weapons in certain northwestern territories near the

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Finland border. Meanwhile, the Baltic states, which have nothing to do with it, have not ratified it. None of them have. I can't avoid this topic. If it proceeds in the same way, we would be forced to reconsider our participation in this treaty. I don't know how you would do it, but I wouldn't like to make another problem. For us the situation is absolutely stupid and humiliating, because we have taken this decision and are limiting ourselves to numbers and kinds of troops in certain territories. At the same time our partners have not signed the treaty. You're the first person I've told this to and I wanted you to know about this. We are going to try and address this in the most intelligent manner, avoiding any kind of confrontation. We are going to look for a mild solution acceptable to all sides. (S)

I've seen your statement on TV responding to the decision of Congress and I saw how the people standing behind you were reacting. They looked very satisfied with what you were saying.

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The President: You've had a tough winter. (U)

President Putin: Not at all. In the past century we have not had such a mild winter and spring as this year. The only thing in Siberia is that they used to have minus 50, now they have only minus 15. I'll invite you out there. (U)

The President: Great. One way to make sure we are talking is for me to send Gates to see his counterpart, and you if possible, to discuss the missile shield and the conventional treaty. I'll tell Condi to make sure there are close consultations on the issue of Kosovo. (S)

President Putin: When I was in Munich, I talked to Gates. I think that any option would do for me. I could also send my new Defense Minister to the U.S. Any conversation will do and I support your idea to have these contacts. Your proposal is very important. (S)

The President: The important thing is for you and me to stay in touch. If there are problems we can tell our people to work harder and closer together. Plus I like to hear your voice. (S)

President Putin: Thanks very much. Come and see me here. Maybe you can come over just after the G8 for the CIS Summit. All the leaders from CIS countries will be there. At the same time we will have an economic conference dedicated to the economic issues in CIS countries. Since the U.S. is showing great interest in Central Asia and other CIS countries, it would be a good forum to meet them with the emphasis on the economy. It will be the 10th of June. (S)

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The President: I'll give any suggestion you make consideration.
One thing, it would certainly make a lot of news. (U)

President Putin: It would be nice if you could come. I think
that instead of this territory as a platform for rivalry, it
could be a platform for cooperation. I think it would be a good
message. (S)

The President: I love talking to you. Give the family my best.
(U)

President Putin: Thanks very much, George, and give my best
regards to Laura. I'm happy to hear you and thank you very much
for this initiative. (U)

The President: Thanks, Vladimir. (U)

-- End of Conversation --

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